

ACADEMIC VOCABULARY

theme: a message about life or human nature that the writer shares with the reader

stated theme: a message that is stated directly or is immediately obvious to the reader

implied theme: a message that is not stated and must be inferred by the reader

recurring theme: a theme that can be found in different texts, often of the same time period or culture

universal theme: a theme that is found throughout all of literature, in different cultures and in different time periods

HERE'S HOW

Step 1: Identify the subject. As you read, ask yourself: What is the subject, or topic—the material who and what—of this work?

Step 2: Identify stated themes. Ask yourself: Does the writer state a direct message to readers stated opinions or judgments about the subject?

Step 3: Identify implied themes. For short stories and novels, ask yourself:

- **Characters:** What are their key traits? How do they change during the story? What important statements do they make?
- **Plot and Conflict:** How is the conflict resolved?
- **Title:** Does the title mention an important idea, event, or character?

For poems, jot down words and phrases that fit these categories:

- **Word choice, imagery, repetition**
- **Metaphors and other types of figurative language**
- **Questions asked by the speaker**
- **Direct statements in which the speaker addresses the reader**

Step 4: Write a theme statement. Use information from your analysis to write a complete statement about the subject.

Step 5: Compare and contrast themes. Examine the way similar themes are treated in different texts. Ask yourself:

- How is the message delivered in each work?
- How does the message vary work to work?
- Can one theme statement apply to *both* texts?
- Are the texts examples of **recurring themes** in a culture or by an author?
- Are the texts examples of **universal themes** throughout history?